BRIEFING against the WITCH HUNT

5p

STOP THE WITCH-HUNT!

By REG RACE

MICHAEL FOOT'S decision to make the selection of a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate in Bermondsey a test case will look pretty absurd in retrospect. Abusrd on two grounds — first, because of the kind of person that Peter Tatchell is; and second, because of the alleged principle which the Leader of the Party seeks to defend.

The accusation levelled against Peter — that he is somehow "against Parliamentary democracy" because he is in favour of demonstrating and campaigning within the working class — is ridiculous even to that epitome of social democratic orthdoxy, the Guardian newspaper. That accusation has more to do with the paranoia of the PLO in the face of a resurgent labour movement than anything else, and on a desire to make the Labour Party safe for any potential David Owens, Shirley Williamses, or Roy Jenkinses who might still be within the PLP.

But one crucial point which the right overlooked was the Labour Movement's history, and its commitment to changes in the machinery of government. The Labour Party is the only major party in Parliament that grew up outside it first. All the others — Tories, Liberals, and SDP — developed their strength from parliamentary alliances to "support the King's government"; and their need for extra-parliamentary arms came only when the franchise was extended to working men in 1867, or when, in the case of the SDP, they wished to gain electoral power for an existing clique of parliamentarians.

For it was not a precondition of success for the old Tory and Whig/Liberal parties to be able to mobilise democratic sentiment outside Parliament. They were there, elected in the rotten boroughs or on a restricted franchise, and could make what alliances they chose in Parliament in order to protect the interests of the ruling class — albeit a ruling class that sometimes diverged in its interests as between landowners, financiers, and industrial capitalists.

The Labour Movement was created to challenge this structure of power, which rested in practical terms in Parliament, and mobilised enormous resources of material and ideology to defuse the aspirations of working people. In opposition to this, the Labour Movement posed several key concepts — the notions of class solidarity, political consciousness, and equality of wealth and power. These concepts were not ends in themselves but were tools to create personal and class freedom in a hostile world; and the means to the end was extra-parliamentary activity. The Chartists used it to demand trade union freedom and an open franchise irrespective of wealth. The trade unions used it to demand an eight hour day, and the suffragettes to demand the vote for women.

The anti-fascist campaigns of the 1930s used it to aid the Spanish Republicans, mobilise against Hitler and prevent the spread of fascism to Britain. The intention was to combine the power of the working class outside Parliament with a socialist majority inside Parliament which would legislate permanent changes in the political and economic landscape of Britain.

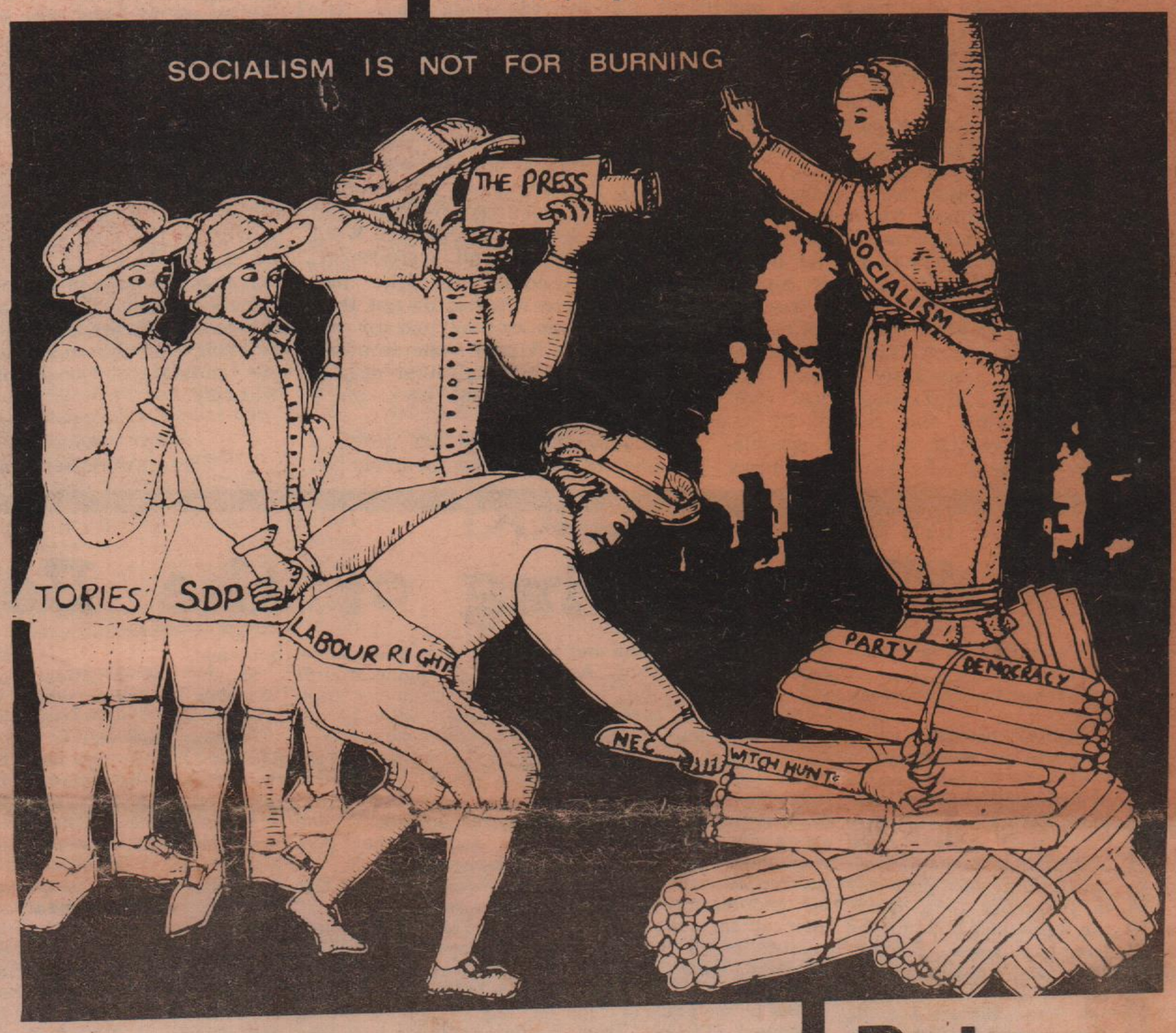
This has not happened. What has happened is an abandonment of the substance of socialist politics and a continuing commitment only to the existing institutions of Parliamentary government.

For we are not just talking about the House of Commons. The Monarchy has an acutely political role, even in "normal" conditions, through the conventions applying to the choice of a Prime Minister and the timing of General Elections. The House of Lords, unelected and unaccountable, is the longstop for the Tory party on all matters of substance. Even the House of Commons, elected by universal adult suffrage, is grossly unrepresentative — only 19 women out of 635; not a single black MP; miniscule numbers of manual workers but plenty of lawyers, businessmen and teachers.

How can we be asked to support such an unreformed system of "Parliamentary Democracy"? It cannot be said to be Labour Party policy, for we are in favour as a Party of abolishing the House of Lords and reforming the machinery of government. And we must, as a Party, take seriously the archaic, isolating and deradicalising effects of Parliamentary life which infect even the most assiduous and committed of socialists.

Of course the establishment has no such constutitional approach. They have enormous power in the media, to influence the received ideology of working people. They have economic power to determine the standard of living. Their Parliamentary wing, the Conservative Party, is only one of a number of divisions in the army used to control society for the benefit of the rich and powerful. But we, poor socialists, are asked to limit our activities to Parliament alone, for fear of offending those who we seek to remove from power. It is too pathetic for words.

The Labour Movement, if it is not to be neutered and totally neutralised, must recognise that since our famous 1945 election victory, we have disarmed ourselves. Key ideological battles have been lost, there has been an excessive reliance on the ability and willingness of the PLP to implement fundamental social changes, and our leverage over ideas in the working class has been crucially weakened. It really is time to change course before it is too late.



Cath Tate



Dennis Skinner:

"You can't afford to fragment the Party in any way at all. The Party must be unified in opposing the Tebbit Bill — both in parliament and when it becomes law. You can't be fighting the enemy and at the same time have your attention diverted to witch hunts. Once the witch hunt process starts, then it consumes much time and energy that we need for fighting the Tories.

Rank and file trade unionists should realise that it's those who are being witch hunted who will be on the picket lines fighting the main enemy.

As for the right wing, they should be the last to talk about organised groupings in the party. If you want to talk about cloak and dagger stuff, then you only have to look at the right wing groups like the Manifesto or CLV for a model — paid officials, secret membership lists.... They've got the lot!"

Peter Tatchell writes

Labour is a very broad church, but Bishop Stortford is a bit beyond the pale. This bloke Bishop Stortford is a relative newcomer to the Party - he only joined in January - - and already he's telling everybody what to do. And he's doing it without any consultation.

None of us were part of Bishops Stortford. We don't know what went on on. We don't know what bargains were struck. The whole way Bishops Stortford was organisedi is the antithesis of a democratic party.

It really is like feudal monarchs surrounding themselves with a few barons and organising how the kingdom shall be ruled, with the serfs and peasants locked out from the castle gates.

Everybody wants party unity. But a witch hunt has been initiated by the Right. For them to say we should just keep quiet and suffer these attacks silently, I think is absurd.

If people really want Party unity, they've got to uphold the constitution — which they haven't done in my case — implement agreed party policies, remain accountable to the rank and file, and stop the witch hunts and the attacks on the left..

I'm very sceptical about the prospect of being endorsed. I've not got a single shred of evidence of any climbdown. And if they try to impose a candidate on Bermondsey, it will make a nonsense of the alleged truce.

So: keep up the resolutions to the NEC: let them know the strength of feeling in the CLPs.

The Bermondsey Mafia

WRITING in *Tribune* forty years ago Aneurin Bevan declared: "We believe that the solution of many of our difficulties would be found if the people could be persuaded to take more control of the parties which are supposed to speak for them. It is not more parties we want, but rather more democracy in the parties that already exist." Michael Foot, who was to become Bevan's biographer, would no doubt have concurred at the time. It is clear that in Bermondsey today Michael Foot does *not* believe in people having control over their own party and has actually set back that movement in his profoundly regrettable decision not to endorse the duly selected prospective candidate for Southwark-Bermondsey, Peter Tatchell.

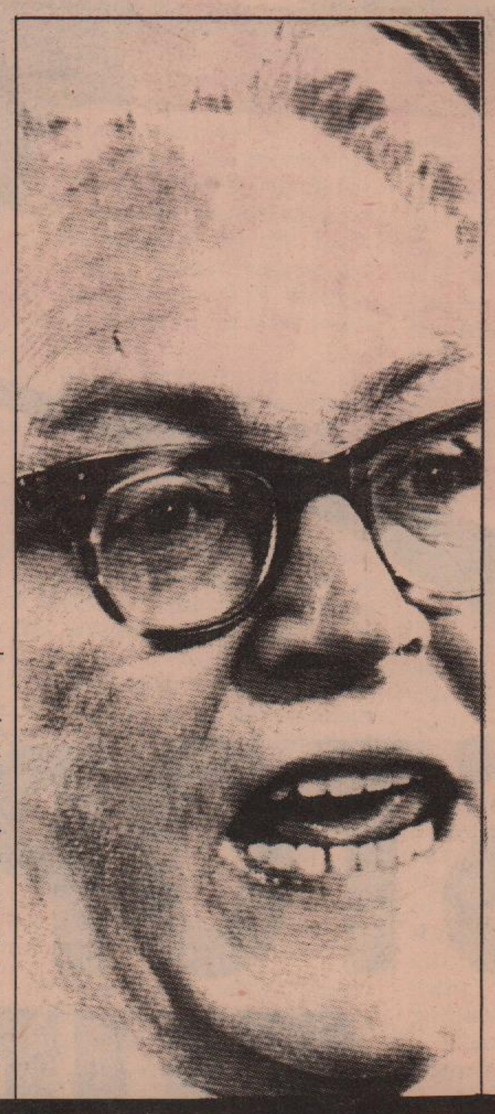
Over the past two years, Bermondsey Labour Party has come through a very exciting period. Membership has doubled, regular newsletters distributed to every household, the Women's Section revived and renewed links have been forged with trade unions, tenants' associations and community groups. The Party has spearheaded local campaigns against the closure of St. Olave's Hospital and the speculative carve-up of the Bermondsey riverside by property developers. Labour has come alive again and has shown a new determination to be the voice of local people fighting for, in the words of its popular slogan, "A Better Bermondsey". Michael Foot's action was a sudden and unexpected blow to a Party which has such a proud record of achievement to which Peter Tatchell, as Party Secretary during that period, has made a major contribution.

For too long Bermondsey has been a by-word for the unacceptable face of right-wing inner-city Labour rule. The sadly accurate term "Bermondsey mafia" was widely used to describe the local Labour leadership on the Council and it was small wonder that the party had become by the late seventies moribund and politically sterile. Depopulated Ward Branches, low or nil recruitment, time-serving councillors who had ceased to care whether or not they attended surgeries, the pattern was depressingly familiar. Bermondsey was a rotten borough that desperately needed putting back on a socialist course.

Accordingly, in March 1980, a number of local party members put up for a range of constituency party officer posts and swept the board. Bob Mellish MP called it a "palace revolution", but to many local party members who had been trying for years to change the party into a CLP that would be prepared to fight the local campaign for socialism, it was a sign of hope. The past two years have more than justified that optimism and the Party's decision to choose Peter Tatchell as its prospective candidate represented a determination to see the Party once more back on a true socialist course and taking the new campaigning style of politics which had been successfully tested in Bermondsey, into the Parliamentary arena.

We cannot believe that the Labour Party really wishes to stamp out broad-based popular local political activity of this kind. On the contrary we see the kind of political practice that we have in Bermondsey as something all CLPs should be engaged in. We are fully behind Peter Tatchell, our chosen candidate, and the candidate of the people of Bermondsey.

Nick Murray
Assistant Secretary,
Southwark-Bermondsey CLP



LES TATE recounts the drama of

The sinking of the Bermondsey

'Peter Tatchell is innocent OK!'

'Release the Bermondsey One!'

Disband the NEC!'

Victory to the People's Proletariat United League of Extra-parliamentary Activists NOW!'

So read several large angry banners outside Walworth Court on a grim day in December 1981. Inside the formidable building the five Law Lords, Kinlock, Lestory, Whealey (code-named 'the Whale'), Fitzroy 'Mad' Hatters and the Rev. Peter R.U. Sure, were hearing one of the great mysteries of all time: the case of P.C. Mike Foot versus the Labour Party (in absentio).

'Milords', began the Rt. Honourable Sir John O'Gravy Train, councillor for the prosecution, 'it is with some regret and distress that I recount to you this shocking tale of intrigue, insubordination and downright insurrection. As you are aware, Sir,' he turned to an anormous panda-like figure propped up on several cushions, the figure of the presiding judge Sir Eric Heffing-well-Shuttitson, 'as you are well aware, Sir, the crew of the Bermondsey did, on several and various occasions, mutiny and attempt to ditch their captain in the drink!'.

Mutters all round of **'Godless Trots', Loonies, Upstarts.**

'But by the grace of God' continued O'Gravy Train, smiling down at the collection box, 'And, of course, the Docklands Development Corporation, he was picked up by one of their passing cargo ships. But, gentlemen' his voice rose an octave, 'far worse was to follow, far, far worse!'

The panda-like figure of Sir Eric slipped a few inches into the presidential cushions. 'Imagine Milords this poor cretinous captain's position when he returns home destitute from his years of suffering in the City. When he returns home to his beloved Docklland, his heartland, and what should the poor wretch encounter?'

His voice rose, Sir Eric slipped a little further.

'Yes! This same godless gang! they had organised the local residents — a simple folk — into an armed angry mob, boarding ships, occupying hospitals, blocking highways, and...' Here the council's pitch became slightly hysterical, while the panda disappeared completely into its cushions, '...and calling out for the resignation of the chief mate! Yes, Milords, even alleging that new crew members were turned away from the good ship while old hands were offered bounties!'

Shouts of **'Ultras!'**, **'Weirdos'**, **'Extremists!'**, **'Terrorists!'**.

O'Gravy Train paused to dry his eyes. By now only the panda's black glasses remained to signal the spot of his engulfment. Council continued sadly, reflectively: 'Milords, I submit respectfully that these people are inveterate lefties and all out to change things; and in order to clinch the argument I would now like to call the only witness allowed. Please your Lords: P.C. Mike Foot!'

'Call P.C. Wrongfoot!'

'Call P.C. FlatFoot!'

'Call P.C. Footinit!'

After a long pause enter a lonely shambling figure with head bent, seemingly preoccupied with his undone shoelaces. Staring determinedly down at his odd socks he began:

'It has been alleged, gentlemen, that I mistook this Tariq Tatchell fellow, and that in fact I had Peter Ali in mind when I made my statement'.

Suddenly he flung his head back in an attitude of devotion. 'Nothing could be further from the truth. That is completely falacious. I deny that'.

Here he glanced quizzically over his glasses, 'Of course some people say, oh I know what they say, these people argue that I rejected this fellow ever becoming a member and, of course, this Bermondsey chap what's his name was already a member; of course they say that, and it is their democratic right to say that'.

He flicked back his hair suddenly, 'However, however, have they considered what the philosophers say? Of course they can believe, if they wish to believe, and I believe that they believe in their belief, but let my just make this perfectly clear, absolutely and perfectly clear to everyone watching, so that there can be no shadow of doubt: I did not mean or intend to mean Peter Tariq. It was always clear in my mind that Ali Tatchell should never be a member'

He stared round bleakly through his glasses. 'And, of course, that now means that the average ship's ratepayer need have no further fears of supplementary lefties'.

A muffled 'Bravo! Bring my axe' broke from a heaving mass of cushions which now occupied the presidential throne. At that moment 40,000 long-haired lecturers broke through the door shouting: 'I'm attached to Tatchell!', 'Bermondsey for Cup!', 'Nuke the NEC!'.

The division bells rang unexpectedly for half time. The court was cleared. For a short while.



Peter Tatchell for the NEC?

FOLLOWING the NEC's refusal to endorse Bermondsey's democratically-selected parliamentary candidate many comrades have suggested that Peter Tatchell should be nominated for election to the constituency section of the NEC at Annual Conference in October.

They have argued that this would be a way in which CLPs could express their solidarity with Bermondsey and show their rejection of the NEC's arbitrary and autocratic removal of the right of constituency parties to choose their own candidates.

It would also ensure that the interests of CLPs were represented on the NEC by a grassroots Party member. This is all the more necessary given the NEC's challenge to the selection of several parliamentary candidates in different constituencies and its intervention into the Southwark local government selection process to foist eight highly unpopular councillors back onto the Panel of Candidates against the wishes of local party members though we had followed the Constitution meticulously.

Comrades have pointed out that if Peter Tatchell were to be elected to the NEC, or merely receive a substantial number of votes, it would give an added impetus to any appeal by Bermondsey for Annual Conference to overturn the NEC's decision. In such circumstances, the Conference could hardly refuse to endorse his candidature.

Though many of us in Bermondsey think the election of Peter Tatchell to the NEC is a good idea, we share some reservations in view of the effect it might have on the chances of other deserving and more long-standing candidates.

A decision of this nature must be made on the basis of the widest possible consultation and agreement. Thus, before Bermondsey decides whether or not to stand Peter Tatchell for the NEC, we wish to take soundings from other constituency parties. On the basis of the feedback we receive, we will make our decision.

We would therefore greatly appreciate the help of comrades throughout the country to sound out their local parties and communicate the responses to Bermondsey Labour Party, 133 Lower Road, London SE16. We would also be grateful if comrades who support Peter Tatchell's election to the NEC would communicate their views to the Labour press through letters and articles.

Bette Crickmar,
Vice-Chair
Bermondsey CLP

JO RICHARDSON recalls a Transport House inquisition

I remember the days of Will Lowthe and Arthur Deakin, who sought t rule the Party by bullying tactics The "shut yer gob" attitude. How ever the CLPs struggled to make the voices heard, the Unions, the NE and wider opinion was ignored.

The NEC at that time had special inquiry sub-committee whic interrogated potential candidates they were unknown, or if they wer known to have deviated from th NEC's line. I fought Monmouth i the General Elections of 1951 an 1955 and Hornchurch in 1959. Som time after that I was renominated t List B of Parliamentary Candidate by my party. My endorsement b the NEC was vetoed by Hugh Gai skell because he had seen a report i his local Hampstead paper that I ha attacked his views as Leader of th Party at a local meeting organised b the Young Socialists, and the matte was referred to the Inquiry Com mittee.

I was summoned to a meetin without knowing what I was accuse of. The late Bessie Braddock was i the chair, flanked by the late Sara Barker, then National Agent an Ray Gunter. I seated myself an produced a notebook. The dialog then went like this:

Bessie: "What are you doing wi that?

Me: "Taking notes, of course".

Bessie: "That's not allowed".

Me: "But surely, since I've be

30 years as a heretic

MY personal experience of t heresy-hunt extended over mo than thirty years, from the ti when I was nominated for bo Coventry East and Coventry West 1945, receiving more than thi nominations for one of the seats.

The right wing NEC refused validate these nominations, on t grounds that I was a 'secret Co munist', although an NEC inqui held after the 1945 General Electi found no proof of this allegati and I continued my membership the West Midlands Regional Cou of the Party and my executive po ion in Coventry Labour Pa throughout.

The heresy-hunt continued af the 1945 election, and obstac were put in my way by the NE assisted by right wing leaders of AEU [engineers' union] each tim attempted to obtain a nominati The only exception to this came 1955, when I fought Stockport So — a sudden General Election me that there was no time for norm validation procedures to be carr out, and the NEC did not oppose candidature, as the election was l than three weeks away.

After 1955, the heresy-h started up again. Over a thirty y period, I was nominated in s constituencies, of which Horsh was the most notorious.

In 1961, my nomination was va ated for Horsham by the NEC, a was selected as the candidate. NEC then refused to endorse candidature, and I went through another NEC investigation — c ducted by Ray Gunter and Geo Brown. Nearly 250 constituen wrote to the NEC to protest at t behaviour over Horsham, but t were adamant, and after a yea wrangling, I gave up the fight.

Ironically, at the time when candidature for Horsham was fused, the NEC endorsed a can ate for another Sussex seat — an Fascist, with a sixteen-year rec of support for Oswald Mosley p to his conversion to Gaitskellism

ERNIE ROBERTS M

The bad old days

"That's not allowed" said Bessie

summoned to meet the Inquiry Committee, I'm entitled to note what is said?"

Bessie: "I'm ruling that you will take no notes. The only notetaking will be ours and will form the basis of our report on you to the NEC."

Me: "But I don't know why I'm here, and if you are reporting to the NEC, and for some reason it's an adverse report, natural justice demands that I ought to have an accurate note of the proceedings."

Bessie: "I've told you. I forbid you to take notes."

Me: "In that case, I'm going."

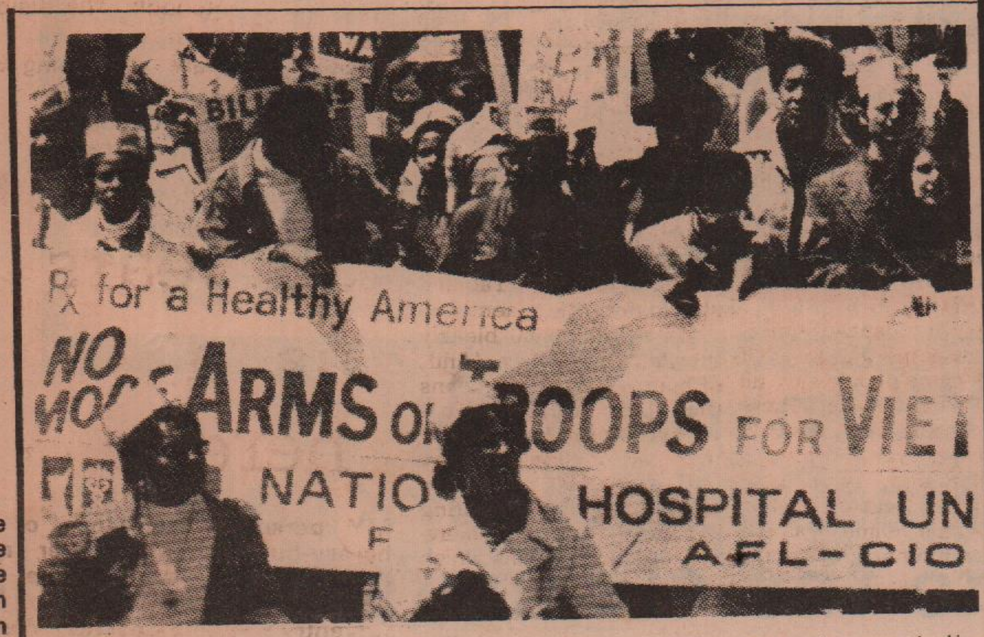
And I left.

Some months later, a further attempt was made by Ray Gunter to reconstitute the meeting. I was again told I couldn't take notes, and again I left.

Nothing further happened. I remained unendorsed for list B until Hugh Gaitskell died. I reapplied for list B, and was endorsed without question.

Over the last few years, the NEC of the Party has been moving slowly towards a more democratic and less authoritarian structure. The growing voice of Labour Party members at local level in wanting a real say in their choice of Members of Parliament, the wider franchise in the election of the Leader of the Party, and the attitude of the NEC in wanting to retain members and to accommodate varying views in the Party instead of looking for grounds to expel them if they deviate from the NEC's line has been a healthy and libertarian process.

I don't want to return to those authoritarian days. I hope no-one else does either.



Statements unbecoming a Labour candidate

IT IS an odd feeling to be a footnote to history. But if those seeking to refuse endorsement to the parliamentary candidature of Mr Peter Tatchell are looking for a precedent, they will have to turn to the case of Palmer, John, versus the Labour Party NEC–1966.

Just a month before the general election that year the NEC, on the advice of the Organisation and Discipline Subcommittee, refused to endorse me for the – now renowned – constituency of Croydon North-west. I had fought the 1964 election in the Labour interest, but in 1966 I was called to appear before the subcommittee to account for various "outrageous" statements I had made in the 12 months before my selection by the local CLP.

The subcommittee consisted of Mr George Brown (now defected to the SDP), the late Mr Ray Gunter, and the late Mrs Bessie Braddock MP – as well as two officials, the late Miss Sara Barker and Mr (now Lord) Reginald Underhill.

Mr Gunter charged me with making statements "unbecoming a Labour parliamentary candidate and more becoming a political corner boy". He particularly objected to a speech I had made referring to war crimes committed by the Americans in Vietnam, and suggesting that Labour leaders who supported the Americans were "accomplices before the fact of war crimes."

The subcommittee also was indignant that I had described Labour's proposed immigration controls as "a Dutch auction with the Tories and the racialist right, which would play directly into the hands of racialists who blamed immigrants, and not British capitalism, for bad housing or unemployment."

And they objected to articles which implied that, without the pressure of a mass movement at the base, the next Labour government would drift to the right and impose economic policies which would open the way for the Tories to return to power.

The subcommittee interviewed me at two meetings, and demanded that I publicly retract such statements. I refused and they withheld endorsement. Croydon North-west then reselected me in defiance of the NEC, and only on the third time accepted an imposed candidate (Mr Michael Stewart, now a distinguished economic adviser to the SDP) because I advised them that the alternative would be the dismantling of the entire local party.

This, it might be thought, was harsh treatment and a potential threat to freedom in the Labour Party – as well as to Labour's hopes of harnessing youthful radicalism. This precisely was the view of Mr Michael Foot as he explained forcefully at the party conference that year.

He, of course, still had vivid memories of the way in which the Labour NEC treated dissidents – only five years earlier he had had to be given a visitor's ticket by Young Socialists to attend the annual conference after his expulsion from the Parliamentary Labour Party. He had been accused of "bringing the party into disrepute" over opposition to nuclear defence expenditure.

JOHN PALMER

N E C versus BRADFORD NORTH

Ford Unpopular


Pat Wall

'FORD sees an omen in grandson's birth' – so ran the headline in the **Bradford Telegraph and Argus** three days after Bradford North Labour Party thought it had finally rid itself of Ben Ford MP.

Last October the GMC delegates voted by 35 to 28 in favour of adopting Pat Wall – President of Bradford Trades Council and a well-known supporter of the **Militant** newspaper.

Ford, described by even the most benevolent columnist as a right winger, immediately exclaimed: 'I consider it to be a vote against parliamentary democracy'

The reality of support for right wing policies in Bradford North may be better judged by the nomination returns from the constituency's six wards and its affiliated organisations. Twenty trade union and Labour Party branches backed Pat Wall, while Ford, the sitting MP for 17 years, managed to muster only six organisations to his banner.

The difference in support is not surprising when we look at the political history and associations behind Ben Ford.

Involved with a long string of reactionary states via various parliamentary groups, he is a convinced supporter of the South African-backed Democratic Turnhalle Alliance in Namibia, in public defiance of the wishes of Bradford North GMC.

He campaigned with International News Service, a public relations organisation used on behalf of Bristol Ship Repairers in their fight to prevent the Labour government's plans to nationalise the ship building and repair industry in 1975.

He is also a director of Welltrade International Ltd and was until January 1981 a director of Saunders Walker & Associates.

In short, for many years now Ford has been increasingly out of touch with the political aspirations of his constituency party. A supporter of Dennis Healey, he naturally ignored the call of Bradford North GMC to vote for Benn in the deputy leadership contest, and refused to comply with a call to resign from the all-party group on Namibia.

'My roots are in the Labour Party and that is where I intend to stay', said a determined Ford on October 24th, announcing a campaign to challenge the selection conference. What followed is now well known and has led to a further deterioration in his support.

As comrades will now know, our lifelong Brother Ben has now announced his intention to stand as an Independent candidate if the NEC do not find in his favour – which the NEC has now done, despite a recommendation to the contrary from its Organisation Sub.

The Org. Sub.'s inquiry was chaired by well-known anti-Trotskyist witch hunter John Golding, and failed to produce any substantial reason to invalidate what had been a long, thoroughly open and well organised selection procedure. Among the 'irregularities' claimed by Ford in his letter to Ron Hayward was a claim that the band in the room above the selection conference played louder when he spoke than during Wall's contribution!

He also claimed that delegates were 'jostled' by paper sellers from **Socialist Organiser** and **Militant** as they entered the meeting. It must be said that even Golding was embarrassed by such nonsense.

After the Org. Sub. vote, Ford raged: 'I regard this as a crunch issue, on which the Party leadership must marshall its forces or suffer a humiliating defeat'. He had hoped for a new selection procedure, and that in the meantime the composition of the GMC could have been altered through the rash of party branch AGMs held in January and February.

However, the right wing was soundly defeated at a series of well-attended branch AGMs, and Bradford North GMC is now much stronger for left policies than it has ever been.

Ford started his speech at the selection conference by reading out a personal letter of support from Michael Foot. But Bradford North wasn't impressed, and remains firmly behind Pat Wall (whose nominations include two branches of the AUEW, the union that sponsors Ford).

Like the Bradford District Party, the North GMC is opposed to witch hunts and will fight for as long as necessary to secure Pat Wall as our prospective candidate. We refuse to return to the dark days of Gaitskellism when the right wing vetoed left candidates.

As for Ben Ford's grandson, he must take his place in local history as the youngest tool in a very old right wing machine.

BARRY TURNER
[prospective council candidate for Bradford Moor; member of Bradford North GMC

Double standards on reselection

THE DECISION OF THE NEC not to endorse Pat Wall as prospective parliamentary candidate for Bradford North probably has as much to do with the right's desire to undermine mandatory re-selection as with their witch-hunting of Militant.

Endorsement was refused on the 'technical irregularities' that the selection conference had taken place in a room close to a noisy discotheque, and that a man had wandered into the room from time to time in order to set up beer barrels!

Let us compare this with the irregularities which have taken place in cases where the sitting MP *has* been re-selected. Most of these irregularities have centred around the 'shortlist of one' manoeuvre.

In Cardiff South East, West Bormwich and Pontefract, the National Agent's representatives have misrepresented the NEC's guidelines regarding shortlists of one. When organisations have appealed to the NEC that their nominees had been struck off shortlists for no good reason, the National Agent has replied that there is no right of appeal.

In all of these cases, proper selections have not taken place, despite nominations against the sitting member.

In Pontefract, Geoffrey Lofthouse was re-selected on a shortlist of one after two other candidates were sliced off the shortlist by 43 votes to 41 with four abstentions. The executive committee had recommended a shortlist of one, and, on the advice of the regional organiser, mandated the 20 members of the executive by 11 votes to 9 to support this shortlist at the general committee.

The chairperson had also allowed a letter to be read accusing one of the other candidates of 'having attended communist meetings'.

Despite these dubious practices, Lofthouse was endorsed.

In Darlington, where the accusation was made at the shortlisting meeting that one of the candidates had not communist but SDP leanings, the National Agent immediately invalidated the meeting. Yet he had previously recommended that no action be taken over the communist smear in the Pontefract case!

A further interesting case occurred in Nottingham East, where a right-wing candidate, Martin Sloman, defeated left-winger Ken Coates by four votes.

Despite an allegation that the Manvers Branch, which sent four delegates to the selection, had 55 persons on its books who were not members of the Labour Party, and a further allegation that the electoral register had been falsified to enable one delegate to take part in the selection, the officers and the Organisation Committee recommended endoment of the candidate without an inquiry.

What all this shows very clearly is that different criteria are being applied firstly to the endorsement of sitting MPs and to those who replace sitting MPs, and secondly to candidates from the right and to candidates from the left of the Party.

In other words, the farcical reasons for not endorsing Pat Wall illustrate that any MP who is not re-selected by his local party is now guaranteed a second chance if he can invent even the flimsiest reasons why he should be allowed a re-run.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON,
CLPD Executive.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON asks:

Who's using Hooley?

THE unexpected failure of Frank Hooley to be re-selected in Sheffield Heeley, the constituency he has represented for 14 years, has started up anew the attacks on mandatory re-selection.

The decision of the Labour Solidarity Campaign in January to cease its efforts to remove mandatory re-selection from the constitution now appears to have been conditional on the process not being put into effect in any of those constituencies which have still to select.

One of Solidarity's leading members, Peter Snape, has written to Michael Foot asking him to raise the case of Mr. Hooley on the NEC and demand that Heeley CLP be required to produce 'valid reasons' for not re-selecting him as their candidate.

In other words, the NEC is being asked to act as if mandatory re-selection did not exist.

Foot has publicly repudiated the constituency party, and spice has been added to the situation by the fact that Heeley CLP apparently attempted to mandate Mr. Hooley to vote for Tony Benn in the deputy leadership election. Hooley voted for Silkin and then abstained in the second round, and so the right wing have not been slow to claim a Bennite 'vengeance killing'.

Others have said that Hooley, a vigorous campaigner for the oppressed people of the world, had often been criticised by members of the local party long before the deputy leadership election for his refusal to live in the constituency and his attention to 'worthy but distant' causes to the neglect of local problems.

The truth is, of course, that to argue over the reasons for his failure to be re-selected is a complete red herring. Ultimately there can only be one reason – that on the night a majority thought that the other candidate was better. And within that broad and obvious statement, every individual who voted for Bill Mitchie, the successful candidate, probably did so for different reasons.

If Peter Snape and others now want the NEC somehow to interfere with the democratic process and reinstate Mr. Hooley against the express wishes of the local party, we are returning to the [illegible] days prior to mandatory re-selection when it was virtually impossible for a constituency to replace an MP with whom it was dissatisfied.

In one respect, in fact, it is no different from Peter Tatchell's case – an example of those who hold exalted positions in the Party and who have probably never been to Bermondsey or Heeley in their lives, believing that they know better than the local party.

Were the NEC to act in the way that Snape and others are demanding, it would be a step backwards to the 1950s when, for example, Hayes and Harlington attempted to replace Arthur Skeffington; when Hackney Central voted to replace Herbert Butler; when Liverpool Exchange voted to replace Bessie Braddock; and when Coventry South sought to disown Elaine Burton.

All four were re-imposed on the local party against their will by the NEC.

It happened again with Arthur Irvine in Liverpool Edge Hill in 1971, and it took his local party another six years to replace him. This is precisely the reason why mandatory re-selection was introduced.

JOHN O'MAHONY asks.

ARE YOU NOW, OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN A MEMBER OF THE BERMONDSEY LABOUR PARTY?

JOE McCarthy, the McCarthy of McCarthyism, was a lying, stone-age right wing Irish-American media demagogue of such crudeness that eventually the US Establishment itself had to slap him down and he had lost most of his credibility by the time he drank himself to death in 1956.

How can anybody talk about McCarthyism in the Labour Party? Michael Foot and his understudy Neil Kinnock, are after all *Socialists*.

They are professional democrats. Their witch-hunt is being conducted as a crusade for democracy. (So, as a matter of fact, was Joe McCarthy's) When we link them with people like McCarthy, aren't we just smearing them? Aren't *we*, in fact, witch-hunting *them*? (Joe McCarthy himself was, of course, witch-hunted by liberals and 'commies' as his friend John Wayne never tired of telling the world).

The point about modern political witch-hunting is that it sets up vague and ill-defined targets, or mythical targets, and uses the hunt, the purge and the denunciations *to whip others into line*. It is a simple technique of mass manipulation.

This is quite clear when you examine what US "McCarthyism" actually was, where it came from, who started it, who was served by it and what goals were served by it.

Whip

When World War Two ended, Europe was in ruins and the strongest Army that of the USSR. Enormous pressure in the USA to demobilise the US conscript army had forced the run-down of that army. Isolationist sentiments, opposition to spending American taxpayers' money on the overseas projects that the ruling class wanted, tied the Pentagon's hands to a serious extent.

They needed to prepare 'public opinion' and whip up support for their foreign policy goals.

World War Two had been fought by the USA for control of China and the Pacific. With the collapse of the Chiang Kai Chek regime in China and the conquest of China by the Maoist "People's Liberation Army", China began to slip out of their grasp.

In Eastern Europe, wherever the Russian army had advanced to in the struggle with Hitler, it stayed put and set up governments which, whatever their camouflage, were its puppets.

The old Empires were bankrupt. So the US ruling class was forced to simply pick up the imperialist pieces throughout the world.

The pre-condition was to mobilise the resources of the US ruling class – money and armies. This could only be achieved, in the conditions of American democracy by winning the masses who had forced the demobilisation of the US Army, for a 'crusade against communism'. They developed a technique to manipulate – and degrade – American democracy. A black and white vision of the world was created in which bloody butchers like Chiang Kai Chek (and eventually even Hitler's friend, Franco of Spain) were part of a free world under threat of engulfment by communist tyranny. Every national liberation struggle, and in fact most movements even for moderate liberal reform, which posed a threat to any status quo anywhere in the world were classified as part of the diabolical conspiracy by the forces of darkness.

The witch hunt that we now loosely call McCarthyism was first started as a deliberate act of policy by the government of President Truman to help mobilise the resources of the democratic-minded US people in support of the imperialist goals of their government.

President Truman launched it in 1947. Public officials and those working in 'sensitive industries' were subjected to official loyalty tests to root out communists and "un-Americans". The population was roused up and exhorted to galvanise itself for the crusade.

Then the implications and ramifications of this official purge began to fall into place and to percolate all through American society. Elements of mass hysteria began to build up: who was a communist? Eventually the term became meaningless and so broad as to include liberals, who tried to make their stand on the very rock of "Americanism", on those rights guaranteed in the constitution.

As American government policy suffered such stupendous reverses as the 'loss of China' (for which World War Two was fought by them) to the USSR-led bloc on the final victory of Mao in 1949, the need for scapegoats and acceptable explanations in terms of conspiracies to explain away the humiliating national defeat began to add fuel to the fire. (America had a large army in mainland China when the World War ended. It was withdrawn in 1946 on a decision not to get involved in a 'land war in Asia': they never anticipated a quick and outright victory for the Maoist forces).

Loyal public servants of the US government were scapegoated and witch-hunted: Truman's colleague General Marshall, who had been in command of the army in China and later famous for the Marshall plan to re-build Europe, eventually became a target for the witch hunters!

In the US labour movement the Communist Party had a powerful presence and had played a major role in building the industrial unions in the Thirties, and had perhaps 100,000 members at the end of the war. But they were very vulnerable; during the war they had alienated big sections of militants by breaking strikes to support the war effort. For example the Communist Party (CP) clamoured for the government to carry out its threat in 1944 to draft striking miners into the army and use martial law to break the strike. The CP had supported the use of anti-communist legislation to jail Trotskyist trade unionists and leaders (while hundreds of thousands of trade unionists passed resolutions of protest at the jailings). In addition it was the high tide of Stalinist use of gangster techniques against their opponents in the labour movement. They controlled some unions, often in alliance with the worst sort of strongarm bureaucrats.

These bureaucratic allies now turned on them in response to the government signal. A ferocious faction fight followed for control of various unions, as an adjunct of the great national crusade. And the CP lost most of the contests.

But it wasn't just confined to the CP. Eventually rank and file socialists and militants were witch-hunted and victimised out of the factories. In some factories right wing gangs would hunt down militants.

People objecting to the increasingly wild and uncontrollable search for reds in high and low places tried to stand on the grounds of the basic democratic rights guaranteed in the American constitution. The victims invoked those rights (or at least some of those rights).

So the witch hunters turned on the very idea of those rights which were basic to the American tradition, which they notionally were defending. Movies were declared subversive for making mild criticism of US society in terms of the democratic ideas of such founding fathers as Thomas Jefferson (the comedy Born Yesterday, shown recently on TV, is an example).

All this had long been going on, setting the scene as it were, when Joe McCarthy became prominent about 1950. A Republican, he now belaboured the Democratic Truman administration for continuing to harbour Communist officials in government, for sheltering the traitors who had sold China to the Reds (e.g. Marshall) and given away the secret of the A-Bomb, etc.

His speciality was wild "Sun"-style charges which he fed to a hysterical press and which he didn't even bother to substantiate. He well and truly gazumped the witch hunting Democratic Administration. They were now being witch hunted.

The parallels now? The right have lost control of the CLPs and last summer faced a Bennite offensive in the unions. Even the soft left (not to speak of a lot of hard careerists trying to pass as soft lefts) have little credibility. They have the union leaders, the PLP and, perhaps less firmly, the NEC. They need to rally the party rank and file to the establishment and its goal of a new Wilson/Callaghan style government, possibly in coalition with the SDP.

The solution is to try to divide the rank and file by scapegoating a section of the left, and by focusing on an ill-defined, spuriously argued and emotive issue of parliamentary democracy. Militant is an easy target (it is not exactly the best loved section of the left!). Attacks on Marxists, or even on fairly typical left activists like Peter Tatchell, can be used to bludgeon the rest of the less defined left into line, and to split it. Cheap anti-Toryism is the Labour Party's equivalent of US patriotism. John Golding is now proposing Truman-style loyalty oaths.

Stick

Defence of democracy is an easy-to-use political stick, since in the context nobody quite knows what it means, and because there is just enough truth in it to make it not quite nonsense. (There are those who call themselves socialists who flirt with authoritarianism; there is in the background the lowering fact of the Stalinist states). And it has the advantage of enclosing and encoding the message that the slavish legalism of the Foot leadership in response to the Thatcher government is not an outrage against the Labour movement but part of its most basic politics.

That Peter Tatchell's rather restrained article was the target for Foot shows that the *witch hunting logic* of the anti-Marxist crusade has already begun to unfold: to call for direct resistance to the existing Tory parliamentary majority is already to be branded as an enemy of *democracy* (as liberals were branded Communists in the USA).

This is a witch-hunt alright, and McCarthyism too, though the Joe McCarthy figure has yet to emerge. Michael Foot is its Harry Truman. Foot, Kinnock and Co. should recall that Truman and the Democratic Party themselves ended up as targets for the witch-hunters they set up in business.

The perils of Exorcism

WHEN I was at primary school, there was a run-down old house at the bottom of the playground. It was inhabited by an old, irascible woman. It was hardly surprising that she was irascible, mind, because her every appearance in her garden, beyond the school fence, was greeted by the jeers and whoops of nine-year-old bravado. We kids *knew* that she was a witch.

In the sophistication of Britain in the 1950s, she probably suffered nothing worse than malnutrition, hypothermia, loneliness and perhaps mild psychosis. A few hundred years ago, the rest of the world would also have known that she was a witch, and she would probably have been Tortured, burned, drowned or hung..

In the mania that seized large parts of Europe from the late middle ages until about 1700 literally millions of women were put to death as witches. The vast majority of them were guilty of crimes no more vicious than was the slightly dotty old woman at the bottom of my school playground.

Is it, then, over-stating the case to label current attempts to purge the Labour Party of left-wing activism as a 'witch-hunt'? Just what *are* the parallels?

The 'witches' of the middle-ages threatened social order. Margaret Lister of Fife was accused of being 'a libber', but this was no twentieth-century bra-burning issue. It was part of her indictment for witchcraft, in 1662.

Each witch identified, denounced and dealt with was a blow for the status quo – in the middle ages, for the absolute rule of Christianity – and a reassurance to law-abiding citizens that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Dissenters were evil, and the more that they were publicly demonstrated to be so, the more the ruling ideology could shore up its legitimacy. Hence the value of "confessions" – usually extracted under torture.

I don't suppose the thumb-screws are actually being assembled in Walworth Road (although you can't be too sure), but the technique used in the Labour leadership's attemps to cure all of its ills by deciding on certain attributes which are said to threaten the party and then applying them to selected groups and individuals is hideously similar to the technique of the early Christian inquisitors.

The good old 'divide and rule' tactic, whereby it was usually women who denounced other women as witches will also find its parallel, too, unless we are awake to what is going on. To think 'Well, yes, *we* on the left are OK, but as for *those* loonies, I wouldn't mind seeing the back of them' is very tempting, but would be absolutely disastrous.

Witches are dissenters, outsiders, and call into question accepted social values. They are activists, assertive and non-conforming. What the Labour Party needs now is witches, not witch-hunters.

Anne Connell

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When Ramsey MacDonald took Labour to the cleaners

THERE IS nothing new about heresy-hunting in the labour movement. It has always been used by the right wing to avoid the need to discuss policies, and to increase their control.

Although the 1918 Labour Party constitution for the first time introduced individual membership nationally, the old affiliated organisations continued. This included the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party, and also the British Socialist Party, until the latter became part of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920.

Affiliation of the Communist Party was always resisted by the right wing. The 1922 conference rejected it, with Ramsey MacDonald strongly arguing the case. It was also opposed by Frank Hodges, General Secretary of the Miners Federation, on the grounds that Communists were 'the intellectual slaves of Moscow', and were 'taking orders from the Asiatic mind'.

Hodges soon afterwards retired as a union leader and became a director of an investment company.

Mayor

It has to be said that another impediment to affiliation in that period was that many CP members did not support it very strongly. They held a position roughly equivalent to the modern SWP, that work in the Labour Party would associate them with the right wing.

Nevertheless, CP members often remained active in the Labour Party. Among many others were Joe Vaughan, first Labour mayor of Bethnal Green, Shapurji Saklatvala, who was MP for Battersea North from 1922 to 1923 and from 1924 to '29, and George Fletcher, who was for a time leader of the Sheffield Board of Guardians (elected administrators of the Poor Law).

It was a more difficult task to exclude people of this sort, but it was taken up with a will by MacDonald and his associates. In 1924 and 1925, the Edinburgh and Liverpool party conferences confirmed that CP members could not be individual members of the Party.

There was a good deal of opposition to these decisions in local Labour Parties. In December 1925 a National Left Wing Movement was set up to organise this opposition.

The right wing responded to this by such measures as excluding delegates from conferences, and closing down or 'reorganising' local parties that would not conform. It was in part over this issue that the London Trades Council was 'reorganised' for the first time in 1927, and two separate Labour Parties operated briefly in parts of East London.

Other efforts have been made at times to enforce the policies of the right wing in the trade unions, notably at different times in the trades councils. The most well known case of this was probably in the 'black circulars' of October 1934.

These were sent out by the TUC General Council to individual unions and trades councils. They said that the local bodies had to ban 'delegates who are associated with the Communist or Fascist organisations', or else they would be 'removed from the list of Trades Councils recognised by Congress'. (The bit about 'fascist organisations' was a mere rhetorical flourish, designed to look even-handed and imply that Communists were no more part of the labour movement than fascists: no fascists were ever admitted to trades councils in any case and there was no need for a TUC ban.)

The NUR and the AUE (engineers), among many others, expressed opposition to branches being told who they were allowed to elect. However, the circulars were accepted after a lengthy debate at the 1935 TUC. They were often ignored in practice, but remained in force until 1943.

The period after 1945 has seen many heresy hunts, at times more intense, and often directed against new sets of people. These purges have always produced an atmosphere of fear and recrimination in which the development of new policies has been suspended. They have stifled discussion and increased bureaucratic control without any measurable benefit, electoral or otherwise.

ALAN CLINTON